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ABSTRACT

Although the United States has always been a linguistically diverse country, during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the issue of educating students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) has gained heightened attention and importance due to increasing demographic, judicial, political, and educational concerns. Many non-foreign language teachers who are facing the prospect of educating LEP students feel apprehensive due to their lack of preparation and training in the area. This paper examines these issues, focusing on: legal and legislative precedence for educating LEP students; challenges in working with LEP students; considerations for teachers of LEP students; and using total physical response and the natural approach in teaching LEP students. The paper concludes that the world of the 21st century will continue to change the notion of the United States as a homogeneous, monolingual culture, and if schools are a reflection of society, then delivering quality instruction in increasingly diverse classrooms is a reality with which teachers must come to terms. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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The ABC's of ESOL:

An Overview of English as a Second Language for Non-Foreign Language Teachers

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Abstract

The United States has always been a linguistically diverse nation. During the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, however, the issue of educating students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) has gained both heightened attention and importance due to increasing demographic, judicial, political, and educational concerns. Many non-foreign language teachers facing the prospect of educating students who are not proficient in English feel apprehensive due to a lack of preparation and training. In this article, the author looks at these issues and provides both general and specific pedagogical considerations for those teachers who work with LEP students.

Introduction

Popular perception often characterizes the United States as a monolingual, Anglophonic society. Indeed, the late Senator Paul Simon bemoaned the linguistic naiveté of Americans in his book, *The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis* (1980) when he stated, "The United States can be characterized as the home of the brave and the land of the monolingual" (Simon, qtd. in Chang, 2003). Such misconceptions are as ironic as they are inaccurate, for the United States has always been a multilingual nation. The last years of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first century continue to confirm this pattern. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 17.9% of the population speaks a language other than English at home (Bureau of the Census, 2003), and this number increases when the population of migrant workers and illegal aliens is included.

The growing prevalence of students who do not speak English as their native language and who may be Limited English Proficient (LEP) is reflected in the student populations of America's schools. According to data from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE), the number of LEP students was expected to exceed 4 million by the year 2000, representing a 104% increase in the number of students who are LEP. Furthermore, one in every eleven students in schools is LEP, and half of all teachers can expect to provide services to LEP students at some point in their career (NCBE, qtd. in Menken & Look, 2000). The current global political and economic climate suggests that the increasing multilingual enrollment in schools will show no signs of abatement for the foreseeable future. Therefore, teachers must face the reality, the challenge, and the

opportunity of providing quality education to students who may not be proficient in the language of instruction.

Legal and Legislative Precedence

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, legal and legislative institutions have addressed the issue of education for those students whose native language is not English. The nexus of the relationship between ESOL education and the legal and constitutional questions that surround it lies in Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (Mora, 2002), which states:

> …No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction equal protection of the law. (Cullop, 1984)

The Supreme Court initially addressed the issue of instructional delivery for students with limited or non-existent English proficiency in *Myer v. Nebraska* (1923). The question in *Meyer* was whether Nebraska's constitutional prohibition of foreign language instruction to grade school students due to patriotic concerns arising from America's participation in the First World War violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. The Court held in the affirmative, finding that Nebraska's action was arbitrary in nature and served no reasonable purpose (*Meyer V. Nebraska*, 1923). The relevance of the Court's holding in *Myer* becomes apparent when viewed through the perspective that in the early portion of the twentieth century a significant number of students were receiving primary instruction in a language other than English. For example, statistics indicate that approximately 600,000 children were being taught in the German language in schools

throughout the United States (National Association of Bilingual Education, 1998). Thus, the Court's holding in *Myer* frustrated attempts to deny non-English speaking students access to an education through "English Only" legislation.

Despite the holding in *Myers*, there was little actual relief for non-English speaking students who remained the focus of assimilation efforts through English-only legislation and *de facto* discrimination in schools until the Court's landmark holding in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). With the Court's reversal of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the notion of equal educational opportunities for all students meant that students who did not speak English or were Limited English Proficient had an expectation to an equal education and that language could not be a bar to an equal opportunity education. Moreover, while the holding in *Brown* arose from issues surrounding the Fourteenth Amendment, the presentation of education for LEP students as a Civil Rights issue gained increased credibility, an idea that gained further momentum from the enactment of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Indeed, Title VI of the act, which prohibited discrimination in Federally funded programs and Title VII, which provided funding for school districts who established programs to assist Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, not only complemented the judiciary process but provided a legislative source upon which the courts have relied in subsequent legal challenges (Mora, 2002).

In 1974, the Supreme Court once again addressed the issue of educational opportunities for students who were not native speakers of English in *Lau v. Nichols*. The Court held that the San Francisco School districts failure to provide English language instruction to approximately 1,800 non-English speaking students of Chinese descent violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Court found that the district's refusal to

provide English language instruction denied the students the opportunity to participate equally and meaningfully in the public education program and amounted to a form of discrimination based on national origin. In the wake of the *Lau* holding, the department of Health, Education and Welfare established guidelines for educating LEP students, but these regulations were discontinued during the Reagan Administration (Mora, 2002).

Until the mid-1970's, the majority of the legal and legislative issues surrounding LEP students focused on students who were citizens of the United States. In 1975, however, the Texas Legislature, concerned over the increasing enrollment of children who were illegal aliens, revised state education laws so that systems that permitted children of illegal aliens to enter their schools faced the loss of state education funds. The ramifications of the legislation led to the case, *Plyler v. Doe* (1982). Supreme Court granted certiorari and held that, the Texas legislation violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court found that, although the children did not hold citizenship status, they were still considered to be "people" and thus were accorded status under the Amendment. The Court further found that the Texas statute did not serve "a compelling state interest" and that the law severely disadvantaged the children of illegal aliens by denying them the right to an education (*Plyler v. Doe,* 1982). As a result of the *Plyler* holding, states would find it very difficult to withhold access to equal opportunities to education based on national origin, whether or not the students in question were citizens. By extension, states would not be able to discriminate based on English language proficiency.

While subsequent cases, most notably *Casteneda v. Pickard* (1981), established standards for LEP education programs, the implementation of *The No Child Left Behind*

Act of 2001 (NCLB) has refocused the attentions of both educators and policymakers on educating students who are not proficient in English. Through the "English Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act," (also referred to as Title III), NCLB mandates that:

> ...children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet ... (Sec. 3102)

Title III goes on to require that schools regularly test the LEP student population along with the other segments of the student body in the same subject areas and include the results from LEP students in the overall testing data for the school. Needless to say, while the regulations in *No Child Left Behind* reflect the culmination of nearly a century of legislation and litigation regarding access on the part of students who are not proficient in the English language to public education in America, translating regulations into classroom reality poses real challenges for the non-foreign language teacher.

Challenges in Working With Limited English Proficient Students

While increased legal, legislative and demographic exigencies have made the closure of the achievement gap between LEP students and their English proficient classmates a priority, non-foreign language teachers often find themselves under great pressure to achieve academic performance objectives with little preparation, sporadic training and few resources at their disposal. The challenges these teachers encounter frequently transcend the already formidable linguistic barriers. In addition to the language

obstacle, teachers must also work with students and parents who have differing cultural norms when compared to the culture in which the teacher typically operates. These cultural differences may influence the dynamic of the student-teacher and teacher-parent relationships. For instance, in many Hispanic cultures, teachers are held in great respect, and parents may hesitate to offer input to the teacher on matters concerning their child for fear of offending the teacher. This may be the case even when such input has been requested by the teacher or the school. In classes where there are LEP students from multiple cultures, the challenges for teachers in navigating the accompanying norms while attempting to meet achievement goals may only be exacerbated.

Teacher efforts to help LEP students meet achievement goals may also be hindered by the migratory nature of many of these students and their families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), there were approximately 510,598 public school students who were classified as migrants. Often, these students will be enrolled in schools for a period of time, only to leave at some point during the school year due to the economic realities faced by their parents. In many cases, these students experience reduced exposure not only to educational subject matter, but their exposure to and opportunity to function in English becomes increasingly limited. When these students re-enroll in school, teachers often find (as would be the case with virtually any second-language acquisitional student) that whatever English proficiency that had been previously attained has degraded, resulting in the retardation of the overall process of English language acquisition. If one considers that it takes up to two years for a LEP student to converse fluently and between five to seven years to gain the linguistic ability

needed to perform successfully in school (Menken & Look, 2000), the impact of these gaps in student exposure to English becomes clear.

In the face of the demands and challenges that LEP students present, many teachers feel inadequate to the task of providing a quality education. While over fifty percent of non-foreign language teachers may expect to work with Limited English Proficient students at some point in their careers, only between 2.5 and 3 percent of teachers possess a degree in ESL or bilingual education (Menken & Look, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003). Moreover, while many college and universities offer courses, degrees and endorsements in ESL and bilingual education, relatively few undergraduate teacher preparation programs require candidates to take courses designed to help them teach LEP students. In terms of staff development, according to Menken and Look (2000), only 30% of all teachers who taught LEP students received staff development training in order to teach these children. Even in districts where LEP students are provided bilingual education programs, these services tend to have duration between one and three years, an insufficient time for LEP students to gain linguistic proficiency. In too many cases, the methodology that teachers possess in working with students who are not English proficient extends little beyond the isolated pieces of advice gleaned from the foreign language teacher down the hall.

Considerations for Teachers of LEP Students

Although the imbalance between the needs presented by LEP students and the resources teachers have to meet these needs may seem to be overwhelming, educators must remember that LEP children are students and that all students can learn. Even if teachers do not possess formal ESL or bilingual training, there are methods that teachers

can adopt that will develop both linguistic skills and content mastery in students who are yet to be proficient in English. To begin, teachers must have a realistic expectation of what LEP students can or cannot do. Unrealistic expectations only serve to heighten the frustration levels of both the LEP student and the teacher. The increased frustration levels diminish teacher efficacy and reduce language acquisition. In order to establish the baseline performance level of the student, the teacher should carry out an assessment, either formally or informally, and proceed to set goals and objectives based on the information provided from the diagnostic evaluation.

Once the teacher has an understanding of the linguistic capabilities of the LEP student, the teacher should plan instruction so that language acquisition is as closely connected to the course content as possible. Since it is to the LEP student's benefit that as much of the course instruction as possible be undertaken in English, the teacher should make sure that the terminology used in the course is accessible to the student through definition and re-enforcement and that the use of terminology is stable and consistent (Menken & Look, 2000). Additionally, teacher oral production should occur at a natural rate and volume. Speaking at an exaggerated slower rate and at louder volume will not provide the LEP student with opportunities for authentic language acquisition.

When planning course activities, the teacher should allow for active or "hands-on" experiences that will allow the LEP student to learn English and the course material in context. Opportunities such as collective learning will allow the LEP student to apply the target language in an orderly and focused manner, rather than viewing English from the viewpoint of random and abstract utterances. Group activities will also permit the LEP student to practice English proficiency among peers, potentially reducing frustration

and enabling the student to become a part of the classroom community. This sense of belonging to the class may also be enhanced through the assignment of a study partner who can guide the LEP student with the complexities of the assigned task as well as help the student with the socialization processes that occur in classes and schools. As with any type of activity planning, teachers who instruct LEP students need to have clear roles and expectations for these student and clearly communicate the requirements for the activity in question if it is to have contextual relevance to the student. In learning situations where collective learning activities may not be appropriate, the teacher should take care to plan a range of activities that will give the LEP student to practice language proficiency in a context where the student can achieve course mastery skills (Menken & Look, 2000).

Throughout the instructional process, it is imperative that the teacher remember that, although the acquisition of English proficiency is a primary objective, the LEP student's identity is inseparable from the culture of his or her origin. To that end, the teacher of the LEP student would do well to become familiar with the various norms of the LEP student's culture, including the acquisition of basic words or expressions. Not only can cultural awareness on the part of the teacher reduce the levels of apprehension and frustration on the part of the LEP student, but a cross-cultural understanding may facilitate lesson planning on the part of the teacher. At the very least, the culturally aware teacher would be able to avoid references and contexts considered to be "taboo" and would hence impede learning, and optimally, the teacher could fold the new culture into the course content, providing a valuable learning experience for the other students in the class.

Total Physical Response and The Natural Approach

While the previous section discussed what teachers can do to facilitate learning for LEP students in general terms, the following section focuses on two specific pedagogical approaches to instruction, Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach. Although frequently used in foreign language classrooms, these two methodologies are easy enough to learn and sufficiently adaptable so that non-foreign language teachers in virtually any subject area could experience success by using these approaches with their LEP students. It should be noted, however, that while Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach are successful strategies, they work best in combination with other best practices that teachers regularly use as part of their instructional *repertoire*.

The approach that practitioners have come to recognize as Total Physical Response began in the 1960s as an effort on the part of Dr. James Asher to address the challenges facing foreign language pedagogy (Seely & Romijn, 2001). Rather than attempt to attain proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, he posited that first phase foreign language instruction should focus on one skill, preferably listening, since listening proficiency has a high transferability to the other three language skills (Asher, 1969). Indeed, Asher's experimentation seemed to support Harold E. Palmer's contention that action as a response to a spoken command facilitated second language acquisition; in Asher's specific case, this acquisition was expressed in terms of aural proficiency (Asher, 1966, 1969). Hence, the pedagogical method Asher proposed became known as *Total Physical Response* (TPR).

While subsequent refinements of TPR have included the advent of TPR "Storytelling" and a shift from an emphasis on primarily right-brain processes (Curtain & Pesola, 1994) to an increased focus on language learning activities utilizing both the left and right hemispheres of the brain (Asher, 2001), the core principles of TPR have remained constant. As previously stated, the essential aspect of TPR has been the association of movement and language, often through an imperative delivery-active response format. Initially, the teacher models the command through several repetitions, consistently using the target language to identify the desired behavior. Once students respond to the command, the teacher then ceases to perform the target action, relying instead on the verbal expression of the imperative. Students do not undertake oral production until they feel sufficiently confident to make the effort and stressors are kept to a minimum. Though initial instruction through TPR consists of short, basic commands, the level of complexity will increase in relation to the aural/oral proficiency of the students (Curtain & Pesola, 1994).

Teachers of LEP students may find the Total Physical Response approach useful in communicating the basic words and concepts for classroom management and for providing definition of key terms in the area of content. LEP students demonstrate comprehension through modeling or responding to the commands the teacher demonstrates. The LEP student begins to associate the word and gesture in order to obtain the meaning or sense of what the word or command conveys. As the student's comfort level increases, aural/physical comprehension will transfer to oral production. As the student becomes more proficient (and as the teacher becomes more skilled in the

technique), the complexity of the linguistic production may increase to reflect more sophisticated ideas.

The Natural Approach

Developed in the 1970s by Stephen Krashen and Terry Terrell, the Natural Approach is based in the belief that students in a classroom setting can effectively learn a second language (Ommagio, 1986). The approach focuses on binding language to student images and experiences. The emphasis is on linguistic production as opposed to grammatical accuracy with the intent being that the student is encouraged to acquire and produce language immediately. To this end, vocabulary tends to be the primary vehicle for instruction. Students must not be forced to produce language, but should be allowed to engage in oral production when they feel comfortable doing so. Active error correction is discouraged, since the emphasis is on output rather than accuracy. In the Natural Approach, student linguistic comprehension is multi-phasic, beginning with one-word responses to questions and building in complexity to more advanced linguistic structures (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Ommagio, 1986).

The lack of emphasis on accuracy and error correction is a cause for concern for teachers who would attempt to use the Natural Approach with their LEP students, particularly in an educational atmosphere where precision on standardized tests is a critical consideration for all students, LEP or otherwise. Moreover, the considerable emphasis upon vocabulary to the exclusion of other grammatical structures places the LEP student at risk of fossilization at a relatively low level of proficiency (Ommagio, 1986). Nevertheless, the Natural Approach presents the teacher with a viable means by which to engage the LEP learner in English acquisition at an early stage through a

process that reduces stress while allowing the student to build a lexicon with comprehension re-enforced by referents and experiences that are often personal in nature, thus enhancing retention and facilitating use the words in the future.

Conclusion

The world of twenty-first century will continue to render the notion of American as a homogenous and monolingual culture increasingly chimeric, and if schools are reflections of the society they serve, then delivering quality instruction in increasingly diverse classrooms is a reality with which teachers must come to terms. If teachers remember, however, that all children-even those with limited English proficiency-can learn, and if teachers are willing to use their skills to connect linguistically, pedagogically, and culturally to these students in order to them part of both the classroom and the larger society, then a valuable learning experience has been gained for all parties involved in the process.

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